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SUBJECT: MEDVEDEV'S MESSAGE LADEN TRIP TO BERLIN

REF: BERLIN 755

1. (SBU) Summary: The MFA assessed Medvedev's June 5 trip to Berlin - his first European trip as President - as having successfully demonstrated the importance of Russia-German and Russia-EU relations. Although the short, eight-hour visit yielded little on substance, it provided Medvedev an opportunity to establish a rapport with Chancellor Merkel and establish himself as a "reliable" partner (reftel). According to the MFA, a host of issues was discussed, with energy and the Nord Stream pipeline deemed the most important topics. The leaders covered several foreign policy issues, including missile defense, which Merkel reportedly told Medvedev was best dealt with through discussions between the U.S. and Russia. Medvedev used his public appearances to stress upholding the rule of law in Russia in an effort to assure German businesses that Russia was a sound economic partner. The Russian press contrasted Medvedev's debut with the threatening tone of Putin's March 2008 Munich speech, although many noted Medvedev delivered a very similar message, albeit with more bonhomie. End summary.

Medvedev's Positive Message to Germany

2. (SBU) During a June 10 briefing for the diplomatic corps, MFA Principal Counselor Mikhail Markarov explained that Medvedev's June 5 trip to Berlin was intended to demonstrate the importance of Russian-German bilateral ties and allow Medvedev to establish a working/personal relationship with Chancellor Merkel. The brief, eight-hour visit centered upon the two leaders' meeting and a few public events, including a televised public address, with little time for deliverables or concrete results. When asked what was the most important result of the trip, Markarov emphasized the significance of Berlin as Medvedev's first European destination as President and the positive tone of his message, signifying that the new Russian President wished to be a "partner" with both Germany and the EU. Markarov did not mince words over the importance to Moscow of its relationship with Berlin, characterizing it as the "engine of Russia-EU and Russia-NATO relations."

3. (SBU) Markarov explained that synchronized visits - Medvedev to Germany and Putin to France - demonstrated Russia's focus to broaden ties with the EU as they progress toward finalizing the EU-Russia Cooperation Agreement. Markarov admitted that it was important for Medvedev to visit Europe soon after his first foreign trip as President took him to China, and joked that the Europeans could accept this order of travel better than the Chinese, who placed more importance on such symbolism.

Energy and Foreign Policy

4. (SBU) Markarov said that Medvedev and Merkel's discussion on energy was the most important element of their meeting, although Medvedev's offer of a Russia-German "energy partnership" did not lead to concrete results. Medvedev and

Merkel, reaffirming the importance of the Nord Stream pipeline, agreed upon the necessity of overcoming the objections of certain countries, particularly Sweden, to the project.

15. (SBU) The leaders covered the waterfront on foreign policy without going into detail on any topic in particular. Markarov said that when Medvedev brought up missile defense, the Chancellor responded that the issue was best dealt with through discussions between the U.S. and Russia. Markarov noted that while Medvedev's proposal for a legally binding treaty on European security was broached in his public speech but not his meeting with Merkel, the "German side" responded positively without making any commitment. Markarov told us that the CFE Treaty was not discussed by Medvedev and Merkel despite a MFA press release to the contrary.

#### Rule of Law Will Help Economic Ties

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16. (SBU) Per Markarov, Medvedev previewed his political priorities with his message on strengthening the rule of law and promoting more liberal media law, partly in an effort to assuage European concern. Markarov stressed that Medvedev's message not be taken as a new direction away from Putin's principles.

17. (SBU) Markarov pointed out the fact that Medvedev used his speech to cover some of the same issues he and Merkel discussed privately, including his call to remove legal restrictions on Russian investment in European companies, which discriminated against Russian businesses and detracted

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from potential economic cooperation. Medvedev also spoke of the demographic crisis facing Russia and many European countries, which he and Merkel agreed their governments would cooperate on addressing. During the question and answer period following the speech, Medvedev addressed the need to improve conditions in Russia for small and medium sized businesses such as by making capital more available, another area the two leaders had discussed.

18. (SBU) Markarov noted that Medvedev's trip had a significant public component in the hope that his message of partnership would reach beyond Germany's political and business elite. When asked the message inferred from Medvedev's visit to the Soviet War Memorial and cemetery, Markarov responded that Treptow remained important for all Russians and his visit was not designed to remind Germany of its past.

#### Soft Spoken But Still Follows Putin's Path

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19. (U) The Russian media focused largely on the atmospherics of Medvedev's visit, noting his willingness to raise issues of concern to Europe such as the rule of law in Russia, or how the new President's softer tone differed from that of Putin's infamous Munich speech that rattled the West. RIA Novosti's Andrey Fedyashin commented, however, that despite Medvedev's overall positive message or softer tone, his speech covered much of the same ground as Putin's by focusing on Russian differences with the West over NATO, missile defense, and Kosovo, and warning against foreign interference in Russian internal affairs.

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